

INTRODUCTION

Publication of the legal records of the American colonies, for the most part, has been lacking in any systematic approach. In many cases the motivating factor has been local pride, the adventitious possession of manuscripts or the personal inclinations of scholars. Frequently the hierarchial nature of the colonial judicial establishment has been lost to view. The present publication, we believe, has greater logic in its favor.

In 1933 the Executive Council of the American Historical Association, acting through its Committee on the Littleton-Griswold Fund, published the first of its projected series of *American Legal Records*. The inaugural volume consisted of *Proceedings of the Maryland Court of Appeals, 1695-1729*, edited by the late Carroll T. Bond, Chief Judge of the Maryland Court of Appeals, with the collaboration of Richard B. Morris, then Assistant Professor of History in the College of the City of New York. This volume supplemented the program, then in progress, of the Maryland Historical Society, acting as an agency of the State, of publishing some of the seventeenth century records of the Provincial Court, the Court of Chancery and county and manorial courts.

Some years later, Dr. Morris L. Radoff, Archivist at the Hall of Records, Annapolis, Maryland, suggested to the Committee the desirability of obtaining a cross-section of the provincial judicial system by publishing some of the Maryland county court records, in the custody of the Hall of Records Commission, for the period covered by the printed proceedings of the Court of Appeals. To this end Dr. Radoff urged publication of *Liber A* of the Prince Georges County Court Records, covering the period from 1696 (the date of the establishment of the county) to 1699. This choice was dictated to some extent by necessity (all the colonial court records of St. Marys and Calvert Counties have been destroyed by fire; those of Anne Arundel before 1703) and by clerical proclivities (the records of some of the counties on the Eastern Shore are less inclusive and the entries to some extent less informative). However, *Liber A* not only contained entries as representative as those of other counties, such as Charles County, but also illustrated the mechanics of the establishment of a judicial system in a newly-created county. The choice was also based on the assumption that the Maryland Historical Society would ultimately publish the Provincial Court records for the 1696-99 period and on the announced policy of the Society to cease publishing further county court records.

After some discussion the Committee agreed to undertake to publish the records contained in *Liber A* with appropriate introductions; the Hall of Records Commission on its part agreed to make a substantial contribution towards publication costs, to transcribe the text of *Liber A* and to be responsible for an index of proper names. In accordance with this arrangement the text of *Liber A* was transcribed (and to some extent modernized) by Gust Skordas, presently Assistant Archivist of the Hall of Records, and the late Roger Thomas, Senior Archivist. The original intention was to have both an historical and a legal introduction to the records. However, this gave rise to a number of editorial difficulties which threatened to halt publication. The present editors finally decided to pool their efforts and to cover the historical and legal aspects in one introduction, a decision which was